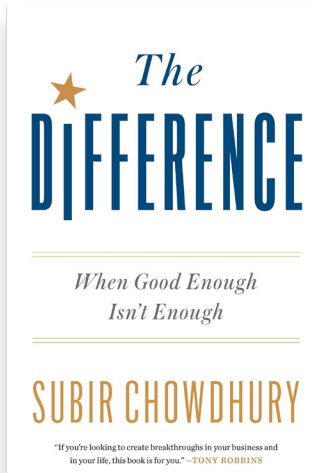


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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Subir Chowdhury is a management consultant and the author of a number of books including The Power of Six Sigma.

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THE SUMMARY

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Introduction: When Good Enough Isn't Enough

This book is aimed at overcoming a fallacy that too many of us, in today's hectic, demanding times, have succumbed to—that good enough is good enough. What I have found in my decades of work with many of the top leaders in business is that we have to do better than good enough. We have to strive for excellence. That process and way of thinking all begins with developing a caring mindset.

While the ideas in this book emerged from my personal experience, and my experiences in the field of quality improvement, its lessons are universal. I believe they apply to everyone, both in their business careers and in their lives outside of work.

It is my hope that the principles in this book will help you develop a caring mindset, one that will enable you to overcome “good enough” thinking, make a difference in your interactions with others, and allow you to enjoy a more successful, happier and more fulfilled life and career.

Making a genuine difference in the world is the responsibility of each one of us. We cannot sit back and rely on the good intentions of others. We must commit to act. If we do that, and practice the four attributes of

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a caring mindset, I believe we can transform our workplaces, strengthen our family ties, reinvigorate America, and transform the world. We deserve nothing less.

Chapter 1: What a Toothpick Can Teach Us About Caring

I've overcome plenty of tough challenges in my life. As a child growing up in Bangladesh, I never dreamed that I would enjoy the life I've lived. After moving thousands of miles away to start a new life in the United States, I faced one obstacle after another including a foreign culture, a new social life, and a demanding job, but I embraced my new home and became a citizen. Today, as one of the world's most recognized experts on organizational strategy and corporate quality, I've helped some of the world's best-known brands improve their processes, save billions of dollars, and increase their profits and revenues. I've worked with all kinds of organizations: profit, nonprofit, healthcare, government, and manufacturing—large and small.

You would think after doing what I've been doing for more than twenty years, I could figure out the answer to a perplexing problem that I noticed in my consulting work. Why do two companies of roughly the same size from the same industry—both of which have implemented exactly the same processes with the help of my team—meet with drastically different results? It didn't make sense to me. One company achieved a return of 5 times their investment—adequate, to me, but hardly spectacular—while the other saw a return of 100 times their investment. I was determined to figure out the difference.

An executive in one of these companies told me he noticed a used toothpick on the floor. "Someone had tossed it on the floor instead of in a wastebasket. And it bothered me so much because I felt . . ." At this point his voice broke a little. "I felt I had done everything I could do to communicate the need for quality in everything we do here. I've been championing quality throughout the company—and then I find a used toothpick discarded thoughtlessly on the floor."

"Subir," he said, "it is indicative of a much larger issue. This is where we work. The point is that someone in our company did this. Now I know why our quality sucks. It is because some of the people here just don't care. If they don't care enough about something as basic as throwing out their trash properly it's clear why there is so little accountability in our operations or production or sales."

"What did you do when you saw the toothpick?" I asked. Incredulous that I would even ask, he said, "I picked it up and threw it away."

Some may roll their eyes at this, but trust me; process alone won't get you where you need to go. Even the best processes lose their power and their efficiency if the people enacting them don't genuinely care about what they are meant to produce. The caring comes first; only after that does the

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process take hold. Good is never good enough.

Too many people just don't care. The danger of an indifferent mindset is not just that it is a problem for large businesses. I believe it is endemic in our country. We are suffering an epidemic of dissatisfaction with our organizations and the institutions that we rely on. This epidemic is driven by a nationwide mindset of indifference.

There are four facets of a caring mindset—what I sum up as *the difference*.

- Being *Straightforward*
- Being *Thoughtful*
- Being *Accountable*
- Having *Resolve*

It is a list that gives us a useful and memorable acronym: STAR. For this star to shine, you need all four facets to be in place. A mindset cannot be characterized as “caring” if even one of these facets is missing.

Think about the last time you picked up trash in a movie theater or on the sidewalk, helped a friend through a difficult time, or thanked someone for a critical but well-intended comment. These are small actions, but the little things add up. They matter. Each of those little things can lead to a much bigger—and better—result. That result is caring, and it is created by every action we take every day of our lives.

How many “toothpicks” do you see in a day? How many things do you see that are not the way they ought to be? What have you done recently about those things? I challenge each of us to develop a caring mindset, because caring is everyone's business, everywhere and all the time. That, in the end, is the difference.

Chapter 2: The Importance of Being Straightforward

The first of the characteristics of a person who has a caring mindset is being straightforward. This does not mean that it is more important than the other three characteristics—I believe they are all equally important. All four have to be present to truly foster the mindset I'm referring to, but I feel one needs the quality of being straightforward in order to embrace the remaining characteristics. By *straightforward* I mean someone who is honest, direct, open, candid, transparent, and fair.

As adults, adopting a caring mindset is a life choice that we make. It requires honesty, openness, candor, and straightforwardness, in every conversation and interaction that we have—with colleagues, bosses, and customers, with friends and family. Without the ability and intent to be

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straightforward, we cannot create and sustain a caring mindset, or achieve a healthy organization, family, or community.

The direct opposite of being open and straightforward, of course, is being dishonest and deceitful or lying. Our internal antenna recognizes it when we encounter it.

Our ability to be straightforward suffers when we are afraid. This is true not only in business but in our communities and within our families. When we are afraid, openness and transparency decrease exponentially. We hide the truth or fake our emotions. We strive to give a false impression to cover up the truth—about how good looking we are, about how clever or competent we believe ourselves to be, about how much money we make. The result is that we live in a world of deceit and lose sight of the importance of being straightforward and honest.

Another dynamic that causes people to be less straightforward is pride. Ego. It is a serious problem in a lot of organizations. Too often, senior leaders don't acknowledge their problems. When they do, they hide them. "How can I tell others that I have a problem with that? They won't respect me. They will think I'm weak." None of us is omniscient. No one is a genius with all the answers. In my experience, the most successful people are not afraid to say, "I don't know." They are not trapped in dishonesty by their pride.

The thing is, when you are authentic, candid, and straightforward, not only will you be more successful, but you will have more fun. When you are afraid to admit your failings, you live in fear. The counter to living in fear is to boldly and honestly say what you think. The feeling of freedom that comes with that is liberating and it is fun. Fear lives at one end of the spectrum of human emotions, and happiness and fun at the opposite end.

Wherever I go, I try to have as much fun in my job and profession as I can. I'm very candid and straightforward, whatever the situation, and I find people appreciate my straightforwardness. I don't try to show people how smart I am. I just enjoy being myself.

The cost of dishonesty—personally and corporately—is considerable. According to surveys, approximately 25 percent of American adults approve of overstating the value of claims to insurance companies. Fraud in the property and casualty industry is estimated at \$24 billion annually. "Wardrobing"—paying for an item, using it, then returning it—was once estimated to cost retailers about \$16 billion. The Internal Revenue Service estimates that the difference between what taxpayers pay and what they should pay is nearly \$353 billion per year.

Each of us has a choice to make each and every day about whether to lead a straightforward life, a life of integrity, or a life that is filled with dishonesty and lies. The choice is ours. So let me end this chapter on the importance of being straightforward in developing a caring mindset with these questions:

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1. What do you lose when you or the people around you seek the easy way out because you are afraid to be straightforward?
2. Are you being straightforward in speaking up now? Why wait until it is too late?

Chapter 3: The Power of a Glass of Water

After I had boarded a plane from Los Angeles to Detroit, and the flight attendant had finished serving drinks to the passengers in first class, an elderly, frail-looking man with wispy white hair told her he was very thirsty and asked for a glass of water. She explained that drinks were not served in the coach section until after takeoff.

He asked again. "I'm very thirsty. Can't you please get me a glass of water?" She again refused him, using the same dismissive tone. Suddenly a young man across the aisle left his seat, went to the attendant's galley, and returned with a glass of water for the man. He ignored the annoyed glare of the attendant as the rest of us gave the young man a round of applause.

The second characteristic of a person with a caring mindset is being thoughtful. By *thoughtful* I mean that the person is attentive to others, considerate, unselfish, and helpful. When we place ourselves in another person's shoes, or see things from another's point of view, and then act for their benefit—when we are being empathetic—we are practicing what it means to be thoughtful.

During a trip to India, my taxi was inching along a street teeming with people. Through the window I saw a child, seven or eight years old, searching for food in a street drain. "Just stop here," I said. I got out of my taxi, took him to a nearby shop and bought him a few things to eat.

It was an instantaneous reaction, much like the actions of the young man on the plane. Having witnessed extreme poverty during my childhood in Bangladesh, I knew that any being, if they were hungry enough, might be forced to gather food from the gutter.

If someone is starving and cannot afford anything to eat, and I can afford it, should I not help? Of course, I realize I cannot help to feed all of the hungry people in the world. But in that moment, it was my responsibility to help that child. Nothing more, nothing less. For that one moment I was able to have a small positive impact on the world around me.

I believe there are moments like that in everyone's day, although perhaps not so extreme or dramatic. Metaphorically, there are moments when a colleague, a friend, or a family member has a hand in a drain, searching for something they need in a difficult time, or who simply needs a "glass of water." Those moments are opportunities to act in a thoughtful way: to be attentive to others, considerate, unselfish, and provide comfort or aid.

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Being thoughtful is a two-step process. The first step involves listening at work, to your customers and your employees; at home, to your spouse and to your children; in your personal life, to your doctor, elders, trusted friends, or experts. A typical study on our ability to listen (there are many out there) suggests that we listen about 24 to 45 percent of the time we spend communicating with others. Listening is the communication skill we use most often, but we are generally not very good at it.

If we don't listen to others, we cannot possibly be thoughtful. Yet most of us do not believe that we need to improve our listening skills; we overestimate our ability to listen purposefully and thoughtfully. We often mistake listening casually to someone speak as understanding what they're saying. Yet too often *we're* thinking about what we're going to say in reply when it's our turn to talk. At the end of the day, our ability to truly listen to others is in our hands. We can all improve our ability to listen.

Listening to others purposefully involves not just hearing what they have to say, but trying to put yourself in their shoes. It involves empathy and understanding. Being empathetic is the second step in being thoughtful.

Empathy requires that you attempt to identify with the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another person. The young man on the plane empathized with the older passenger who asked for the glass of water. He understood what it was like to be thirsty and helpless. I could identify with the child on the streets of Calcutta. Empathy means kindness. Kindness is an *action*. It is the *doing* part of empathy. I try to practice it in my work every day.

Chapter 4: Taking Responsibility

I use the term *being accountable* to mean accepting responsibility for one's action or inaction, in matters for which you are obligated or answerable. Being accountable is the third element of a caring mindset, and the third letter in the acronym STAR. When you take responsibility for your actions, good or bad, you are being accountable.

There are five factors involved in being accountable: (1) being aware that something needs to be done, (2) taking personal responsibility for it, (3) making a choice or decision to act, (4) thinking deeply about the potential consequences of that choice, and (5) setting high expectations.

Having and exercising choice are the most important freedoms we have. And nobody can make those key choices for you. So make positive choices.

Researchers involved in studying consumer choices can shed some light on the choices we make when it comes to accountability. Often the choice involves a decision between what will give us pleasure in the short term, and what will bring lasting happiness and well-being. Do we choose the tempting sugary treat or the healthy salad? The latter choice, while not as immediately satisfying, is often associated with a higher purpose.

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“It’s not my problem” provides short-term relief from accepting responsibility; it is like the sugary treat. You might get a temporary “high” from avoiding getting involved, but nothing will have been resolved.

“What can I do about it?” suggests that whatever problem is in front of us calls on us to achieve a meaningful goal. It is like the healthy salad, and the results will make a lasting difference.

Making positive choices is difficult if you tend to surround yourself with too much negativity. Many people endlessly reflect on negative things, and actually seem to get pleasure from that behavior. Moreover, negative speech and actions tend to attract more negative speech and behavior. There’s some truth to the expression “Misery loves company.”

We are often very good at pointing a finger at someone else, often without thinking about our own part in a situation or problem. It is not enough to merely believe that something ought to be done. Being accountable involves asking, “What can I do to improve the situation?” When it comes to being thoughtful, we change the focus from me to you. We think about the other person. When it comes to accountability, we need to put the emphasis on ourselves—what can I do?

I am inspired by Mother Teresa. Her charitable works are well-chronicled, but what inspires me most is when confronted with suffering she did not wait for someone else to act. She acted. She held herself accountable.

Genuine leaders like Mother Teresa know that they need to hold themselves accountable if they hope to hold anyone else accountable. When those under a leader see their leader being accountable, they tend to act similarly.

An associate of Mother Teresa described accompanying her to an affair at which she was to be the guest of honor. As they left their residence in Calcutta, they spied a man in a bad way lying in a little alley. Mother Teresa knelt beside him, picked him up, and said, “We need to look after him. He needs help.”

Each of us has a God-given capacity to inspire others. It is expressed in our hearts, in our words, in our actions, and in our emotions. It does not matter if we are sitting in a corner office or cleaning washrooms at the airport. The important question is: Are you ready to take that step up? Do you try to inspire others? Do you work to inspire your customers? Do you strive to inspire your colleagues? Do you endeavor to inspire your children? Do you reach out and inspire your community? Why is it so important to inspire others? Because when you do, you will become accountable.

Accountability, in all of its facets (being aware that something needs to be done, taking personal responsibility, making a choice, thinking deeply, and setting high expectations) is a key component

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of a caring mindset. Being accountable doesn't mean you shouldn't ask for help. It means you know enough to ask for help when it's needed. It means resisting the urge to fall back on the same solutions that you tried in the past. It means stretching a little, and engaging your intellectual and creative abilities.

Chapter 5: Never Give Up

Resolve is the fourth characteristic of a caring mindset; it is also the last letter in the acronym STAR. Resolve means having the passion, determination, and perseverance to find a solution to a problem or improve a situation. To me, resolve requires humility and a willingness to change.

I've found that in most organizational settings, innovation and change are met with a great deal of resistance. Our colleagues disagree with us or our bosses are on the fence about a new idea. When we encounter resistance, most of us have a tendency to give up. That's why having a firm sense of resolve—an unflinching determination—is so critical in getting things done.

Jim Collins, author of the bestselling classic *Good to Great*, in which he researched what makes great companies great, identified the resolve of an organization's leader as one of the key factors behind a company's long-term success. According to Collins, companies that achieve greatness are driven by what he termed a *Level 5 leader*, an executive who blends genuine personal *humility* with intense professional will, a mixture he describes as *fierce resolve*.

Collin's research, although driven by a great deal of data, was necessarily anecdotal in nature. How does one measure resolve? How does it produce positive outcomes? No one has definitively answered those questions. My own conclusion, based on my experience and observations working many of the top manufacturing companies in the world, is that resolve is a characteristic of a caring mindset.

A key part of resolve is a *willingness to change and adapt*. In too many organizations, middle managers and senior leaders resist anything new. If they are not open to change, they will not be able to solve the inevitable problems that crop up.

In a meeting I had with senior executives of a Fortune 100 company, they tried to convince me that their 3 percent scrap rate in the manufacturing process was acceptable, even though the waste over the years was costing the company millions of dollars. I said, "Why not try to improve on that rate?"

Over time, and with a great deal of prodding from me, I was able to convince them that improvements in their business and manufacturing process could significantly reduce the percentage of waste. In the end, we were able to reduce their waste from 3 percent to 0.25 percent, contributing an enormous amount of money to the company's bottom line. That is the power of exercising resolve in tackling a problem.

One of the greatest frustrations I face in my business is the lack of resolve on the part of some of the

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executives we work with. Let me give you two stories to illustrate the difference between those who don't exhibit resolve and those who do, and the potential consequences down the line.

The first firm called me out of the blue and said, "We have a critical problem. We need to save \$200 million. Can you help us?" I responded without hesitation, "Yes, I can if I find projects worth that much." My team and I did just that. We saved the client more than \$350 million in the first eighteen months.

Despite the fact that we had a five year contract, and there were many additional savings that we could foresee on the horizon, the client then told us, "You know what, now we know how to figure this out for ourselves." Their sense of resolve extended only to solving their immediate problem. They were only interested in a quick fix.

The other client called me and wanted help with saving \$100 million. We ended up saving them \$250 million. Afterward, they told us what a fantastic job we had done for them. Again, we had an understanding for a longer-term agreement, but the company, satisfied with how much they had saved, wanted to pull the plug.

In this instance, however, we were dealing with a thoughtful, experienced and straightforward executive team. My firm showed them how we might save them considerably more money going forward, and they agreed to continue our partnership together. We did business with them for almost eight years and saved them close to \$1.5 billion. This client did not settle for the temptation of the quick fix, but resolved to let us help them find a great many more savings, and become an even better company.

The first of these clients was bankrupt five years after they ended our relationship together. Their quick-fix mentality and lack of long-term resolve ultimately caught up to them. The second client, after we helped them reach their intended target savings, resolved to set their goals even higher, and we then helped them meet that new target.

Chapter 6: The Coin or the Pen: Choosing to be the Difference

When I was four or five years old, growing up in Bangladesh, my grandfather offered me a coin and a pen and said, "Choose one." Without giving it much thought, I picked the coin. My grandfather tried to convince me that I had made the wrong choice.

In this book I have given you a roadmap for how to create a caring mindset with the STAR principles. I believe it is essential that each of us adopt the STAR mindset if we want to truly make a difference at work, in our families, or as part of our communities. There is no question in my mind that practicing the principles of being straightforward, being thoughtful, being accountable, and having resolve

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will surely enrich your life. I speak from own experience and the experience of so many others I have encountered and worked with.

It was my grandfather who taught me one of the most powerful lessons about exhibiting resolve. A humble man, a poor elementary-school teacher with seven children, he nonetheless had an extraordinary value system, and profound inner wisdom.

When he asked me to choose between the coin and the pen, I argued with him, that with the coin, I could buy chocolates, and with enough coins I could buy toys. So he offered me the coin and pen again, and again I chose the coin.

Finally, he hugged me, kissed my forehead, and told me, “If you pick the pen, you will reach so high in your life that many coins will follow.” It was a lesson I never forgot. In his straightforward way, he told me that, with a pen, I could create something, that all books began with someone choosing to pick up a pen.

The STAR system is not a step-by-step process. You don’t need to embrace, practice, and develop the four aspects of a caring mindset in any particular order. You do need to practice and incorporate them all to create a caring mindset.

Anyone—even a person of the most modest means—can make a difference and inspire others, if they adopt a caring mindset. Having a caring mindset has nothing to do with where you were born or how much money you make. You do not need to be anything other than who you are.

Each of us already has a measure of these principles within us, some more strongly or fully than others. I would suggest that you focus first on those areas in which you are the weakest. If you do not excel at being thoughtful, look for opportunities to strengthen that part of your thinking and awareness, and improve on that.

Keep in mind that the four aspects are intertwined. What I refer to as “being accountable” you might think of as acting responsibly. The words do not matter, as long as you are focused on the goal of making a difference for others.

Practicing a caring mindset is first and foremost about selflessness which means making a difference for others. Ask yourself at the end of each day, “Did I do something today selflessly for another human being, or to better the world I live in?” If you can answer yes, acknowledge that accomplishment. Commit to encouraging others to make a difference. If your answer is no, devise a game plan to make a difference tomorrow.

To be more *straightforward* in your actions, thinking, and behavior, practice developing the habit of being honest, direct, fair, and candid with those you interact with, both at work and in your personal

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life. To do that you must be honest with yourself, and that takes courage. I'm convinced the more truthful you are with yourself, the more successful you will be whatever you do.

To practice being *thoughtful*, work to develop your ability to listen, empathize with others, be attentive, act with consideration, and avoid selfishness. Try to avoid or put aside jealousy and self-interest. Being jealous of another's success is a cancer in anyone's life. If you cannot genuinely celebrate the achievements of others, you will never achieve great success on your own.

To be more *accountable*, be aware of circumstances in which something needs to be done, and take personal responsibility to do it. Decide to act; think deeply about the personal consequences of your action; and set high expectations. Never allow yourself to wallow in self-pity or despair, or permit yourself to feel that you or your actions don't matter.

To strengthen your *resolve*, act consistently to support what you are passionate about. Do so with humility, but be willing to embrace change when necessary to accomplish your goals.

I hope *The Difference* will help jump-start a caring mindset in you *and* make a difference in your life, and in the lives of those around you.

I believe that when you practice the four aspects of a caring mindset, you will inspire others to do so as well and ultimately help to create a STAR culture throughout your organization and community. Practice them until your caring mindset has no OFF switch. Own them. Make them yours. When you do, you will inspire everyone around you to do the same. The principles, after all, are contagious. *You* can be the difference.